

# No Child Left Behind in FLORIDA

## Accountability Creates Confusion

### FLORIDA NCLB HEARING

Academy for Teaching, Learning and Leadership, University of Central Florida • Orlando  
December 14, 2005 • 4:00–7:30 PM  
*Local hearing partner: Foundation for Orange County Public Schools, Orlando*

### HEARING OFFICERS

**Tobi L. Allen**, Manager Community Relations, Lockheed Martin–Central Florida, Orlando, FL • **Ronald Cowell**, President, Education Policy & Leadership Center, Harrisburg, PA • **J. Charles Gray**, Founding Director, GrayRobinson Law Firm, Orlando, FL • **Latha Krishnaiyer**, Past President, Florida PTA, Coral Springs, FL • **Ada V. Rodriguez**, Director, Developing Hispanic Leaders, Central Florida YMCA, Orlando, FL

### STUDENT WITNESSES

**Ben Parker**, Edgewater High School, Orlando  
**David Lopez**, Jones High School, Orlando

### PARENT WITNESSES

**Ivette Mendoza**, Hernando County • **Santiago Fernandez**, Gamal Mack, Orange County • **Gladys Moreno**, Hillsborough County

### COMMUNITY WITNESSES

**Christine Stilwell**, Regional Coordinator, Informed Families/The Florida Family Partnership, Orlando • **Mark Havard**, Human Resources Director, Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Hotel, Orlando • **Lisa Nason**, VP, Communications & Organization Development, Enterprise Florida, Orlando • **Tim Huth**, Deputy Superintendent, Volusia County School Board • **Conrad W. Marshall, Jr.**, Youth Worker, Orange County • **Gregg Wiederer**, Resident, Orange County • **Dorina Sackman**, Teacher, Orange County • **Margaret Gentile**, Senior Director, Student Services, Orange County Public Schools • **Terri Steck**, **Molly Pivaler**, Parents, Orange County • **Marjorie Murray**, Special Projects & Title I Coordinator, Seminole County Public Schools, Sanford • **Tony Bland** (*no affiliation given*) • **Joie Cadle**, Member, Orange County School Board

The Florida hearing was one of nine held on NCLB across the country from September 2005 to January 2006. This excerpt was taken from the full Florida hearing report, which can be found on the PEN website, [www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org), along with a national hearing report and eight other state reports.

*Schools should be held accountable for education, but we must do so in a meaningful way.*

Christine Stilwell, parent advocate, Orlando

Parents, students, and community leaders in Florida are accustomed to test-based accountability, but they are more concerned about making Florida's state policies work than about complying with NCLB's mandates. In fact, the primary impact of NCLB has been to spread confusion and redirect the use of resources that could be better spent on Florida's reform agenda.

This theme characterized a Florida hearing that gave students, parents, and community leaders – audiences very much affected by the law, but usually left out of the policy debate – an opportunity to tell their side of the NCLB story.

LaBron Chance, chair of the Foundation for Orange County Public Schools, opened the hearing by noting the positive aspects of school reform in Florida: an increase in high school graduation rates, a decrease in dropout rates, more students taking Advanced Placement and higher level math and science courses, higher scores on standardized tests, and greater per capita expenditure on students. The hearing, Chance said, was an opportunity to see how Florida's efforts aligned with NCLB.

### The FCAT Dilemma

High school students shared their heart-felt stories. Ben Parker, a tenth-grader at Edgewater High School, explained that even if students improve their grades, if they fail the FCAT, they cannot get a diploma. Students can take the FCAT several times but, without tutoring and other supports, many still fail. David Lopez of Jones High School said that dropout rates at his school were high because the FCAT was getting harder, and students weren't getting enough help. He wanted his friends to stay in school "to become what they can be."

Adult witnesses criticized FCAT, saying it is narrowing curriculum and teacher instruction. Tim Huth, a Volusia County school administrator, underscored student concerns that improvement was not being recognized. He wants NCLB to change from a static AYP goal to a value-added model, noting that "we have students who have gone from maybe a 30 percent proficiency to a 60 percent proficiency, and there's no reward for that learning gain."

Parents criticized the FCAT and NCLB requirement that children with disabilities and English-language learners take the same tests as other students. They said it was painful to see students who are making progress struggle with an inflexible test. As Joie Cadle, an Orange County school board member, explained, "a child who is struggling and is in exceptional ed and is working very, very hard, to put them in that

situation and make them feel like a double failure makes me wonder where that child will be in five years because a child with special needs usually is his/her own worst enemy.”

The conflict between FCAT and NCLB’s AYP requirements gave witnesses the most problems. FCAT alone is confusing to parents, said Huth. Still, he said, FCAT has been around long enough that parents are beginning to understand how it works. The different standard used by NCLB means a school can be progressing satisfactorily under FCAT and not meet AYP under NCLB. A Volusia high school that scored an “A” on FCAT for four years in a row is now in its fourth year of sanctions under NCLB. The school is being threatened with losing its principal and teachers, even though its IB students scored the highest in the country.

<b>Statistics</b>	Total Schools <sup>1</sup>	% fail to make AYP	% schools in improvement	# LEAs	% LEAs fail to make AYP	% LEAs in improvement	Graduation rate <sup>2</sup>	Per pupil expenditure <sup>3</sup>
<b>Florida 2003–04</b>	<b>3068</b>	<b>76.5%</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>71.9%</b>	<b>\$6,708</b>
United States 2003–04	90237	24.7%	11.4%	13959	28.5%	12.8%	74.9%	\$8,308
<b>Florida 2004–05</b>	<b>3105</b>	<b>64.2%</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	Not avail.	<b>\$7,035</b>
United States 2004–05	89493	25.6%	12.9%	13878	23.7%	12.4%	Not avail.	\$8,618

### Other NCLB Concerns

NCLB allows students to transfer out of low-performing schools, or stay and receive supplemental educational services if the schools’ test scores do not improve. In a state where school populations are exploding, these interventions are almost impossible to provide, witnesses said.

In Seminole County, providing these interventions – which costs the school district \$1.8 million a year – means fewer services for Title I schools. Joie Cadle said the requirement to move children around “means that we are moving children into already-crowded classes” because the district is expanding by 7,500 students a year. She added:

*We need to be able to work with children at...their neighborhood schools. That’s where their base is, that’s where their friends are, that’s where their parents’ support networks are. So, keep them in their home schools, allow us to give them the remediation they need, and allow that parent network to stay there for them.*

Parental involvement and communications about NCLB are also concerns. Parent Gamal Mack said that “you’re talking way over our heads a lot of the time when you talk about studies and data and so on...You can take all the data you want, you can throw it at us all you want, but if we don’t understand it, it is useless data.”

Ivette Mendoza, a Title I parent involvement coordinator, said the law fails to emphasize investment in parent leadership. She called for building parent capacity for learning, leadership, and volunteering “because these are all areas of parental involvement, and they’re all important, but not every parent can meet all of them.”

### Concerns About the Future

All witnesses favored higher standards. One Orange County citizen active in the Count Me In! Initiative said the passing rate on the FCAT test is unacceptably low (47 percent in reading for eleventh-graders) and that the test is not particularly rigorous.

Business community representatives, while supporting the basic accountability reforms, argued for a more expansive view of the skills students need. Lisa Nason of Enterprise Florida, a public-private partnership that promotes economic development, said an educated workforce was critical to the businesses that will make Florida competitive in the future. Mark Havard, human resource director for a major hotel chain, said that if educators understood the role of accountability in the business world they would be more rigorous about seeing it happen in education.

Funding for the hearing was provided by the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. and Philip Morris USA.

<sup>1</sup> Title I Report, Vol. 7 Iss. 4 (LRP Publications 2006). Data for columns 1-6 were taken from this report.

<sup>2</sup> Florida Department of Education, Education Information and Accountability Services. <http://www.firn.edu/doe/eias/eiaspubs/2005grad.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> National Education Association, *Rankings & Estimates Update (2005)*. Figures are computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank. The figures are based on reports through August 2005.